

OPSTF

What's Worth Fighting For Out There?



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Chapter 1

WHAT'S OUT THERE

"Teaching is the most inherently hopeful act that I know of."

Patricia Murphy (Teacher, Ottawa)
Toronto Globe and Mail, September 11, 1996

Introduction

Patricia Murphy teaches a group of special education children. Such children, she says are often labelled "emotionally disturbed, difficult, violent and unteachable." Her experience is different. She gets "to share in the progress and achievements of a group of children who know that the odds are against them, but learn anyway." In Patricia Murphy's eyes, teaching is inherently hopeful because. . .

You've got it within you to succeed in life, to be happy and to be proud of yourself. No matter what anyone has told you, no matter what you believe right now, you've got it.

When an individual teacher believes this, she can improve a life. When large numbers of teachers can come to believe it, they can do a whole world of good. There is systematic evidence that teachers who have a strong sense of their own *efficacy*, who believe they can make a real difference in their students' lives, really do (Ashton & Webb, 1986). The prophecy is self-fulfilling. And it works in even the most challenging communities. Hope, optimism and self-belief among teachers are the vital wellsprings of successful learning and positive educational change. Without them, classrooms are likely to become barren wastelands of boredom and routine, and schools will turn into deserts of lost opportunity.

It is individuals who must hope, but it is institutions that create the climate and conditions which make people feel more hopeful – or less so. We know that schools work like this because schools where teachers' senses of efficacy or self-belief are weakest are also ones where teachers work in isolation, lack support and recognition, and experience feelings of powerlessness and alienation. Just to urge teachers to look on the bright side and be more hopeful is not enough. The insensitivities of many imposed reforms, the indignities inflicted by political and media criticism, and change efforts which turn over so rapidly that they can't be implemented properly are draining the optimism of teachers.

Teachers all over the world are feeling beleaguered. Teachers in England express their reactions to impending high-stakes inspection of their school, and to the detailed paper accountability which this demands.

Whatever criticism they make, it's going to feel, however stupid it is, that the last 20 years have been for nothing. It's not about what progress schools have made in the last 15 years. It's "Schools fail." "Head (principal) to be removed." "Hit team going in." It doesn't matter what you look at. It's about failure in schools.

I don't want to lose my optimism. People always say I am optimistic but I am beginning to lose it. I don't want to be negative, for I enjoy some parts, but I'm worrying about the level of support for others I can sustain (as a teacher leader) as I see them suffering more and more . . . We seem to have become (winners) but that is not really who we are.

(Jeffrey & Woods, 1997)

Australian primary teachers respond to far-reaching reforms in the state of Victoria.

They don't really care, it's purely a numbers and monetary game.

They treat us like imbeciles and incorrectly view us as a politically aware and radical group, as "opposition." They have a low opinion of us and we are being punished – pulled into line and disempowered.

Where's it all leading to? . . . you get to the point where you say, does it matter? I've cut back here because of the way I've been treated.

(they treat us as) bodies to be burnt out . . . In the last five years, a lot of joy went out of teaching.

(Bishop and Mulford, 1996)

A Canadian teacher we interviewed in a study of Grade 7 and 8 teachers reflects that:

You know (the media say) we whine . . . , we make too much money and people take this really, really seriously. And I guess I've never been on the receiving end of teacher bashing . . . I mean people who know me, know how many hours I put in, and how committed to the job I am, and what I do for the kids, and when I tell them that I find clothes for this kid, and I drive this kid home, they just go – "what?"! . . . it gets people down reading this stuff over and over and over again . . . Then the board is going through this whole renewal thing. Then we are working without a contract this year, and there is talk of a strike . . . I think it just wears people down . . . But I think there is that . . . constant sort of taking a sore and keeping rubbing away at it, until it gets a little worse and a little more infected and then you've got attitude. And I think as the kids present attitude and we're getting attitude then we tend to give attitude. It's just . . . not a very nice time to be a teacher.

Even passionate teachers, says Fried (1995), are exhausted in the face of apathy and resistance from those around them. Too much educational reform and restructuring is destroying teachers' confidence, draining their energy, eating up their time and taking away their hope.

The *Times Education Supplement* (1997, April) in a survey of 1000 teachers in England calls it "the feel-bad factor":

Morale in Britain's staff rooms has hit rock bottom. Teachers are feeling disillusioned, demoralized and angry at being forced to carry out unpopular government policies while being constantly blamed for society's ills.

What's Worth Fighting For Out There? makes two equal claims. It tells "society" that until it realizes that the quality and morale of teachers is absolutely central to the well-being of students and their learning, all serious reform efforts are bound to fail. Second, it says that teachers cannot wait for society to get it right. They will become their own worst enemies if they do not take action to help break the current deadlock of despair that envelopes public school systems everywhere.

In *What's Worth Fighting For? Working Together for Your School* we stressed that teachers and principals could combat what they experience as negative trends by bonding together in collaborative work cultures. How teachers work with each other, we showed, affects how well they work with their students. Pursuing continuous improvement together makes more sense than complying with changes from outside, or rejecting change altogether. Moreover, cultures of collaboration strengthen teachers' sense of common purpose and enable them to interact assertively with external pressures for change - adopting changes that they value, selectively incorporating aspects of them that fit their own purposes, and rejecting ones that are seen as educationally unsound or irrelevant.

But even professional collaboration is no longer sufficient. Teachers who work with other teachers are sometimes less inclined to work with anyone else. Collaboration can include the school professionals but exclude the wider community. And when families, communities and workplaces are changing as rapidly and dramatically as they are today, this flaw can be fatal. In times of turbulent social change, redefining one's relationship to the environment is crucial. What sort of curriculum should teachers teach in increasingly diverse classrooms? Who will help them cope with the consequences of increased child poverty that absorb their time and have little to do with teaching at all? How should they respond to the constant criticisms and demands for results that are endlessly hurled at them? The environment around schools is not only more complex and volatile. It is also increasingly part and parcel of our everyday existence. What's "out there" is now 'in here', and this calls for radically different strategies and conditions for learning, improving and simply surviving in schools today.

We believe it is necessary to broaden our approach to educational change and school improvement. We also know that our case is not an easy one to argue. Many teachers are already overwhelmed by pressures for change *within* their own schools and classrooms. Don't they have enough to deal with already, without having to attend to yet more demands - demands that will now require teachers to extend their work beyond the school into homes, communities and workplaces? Aren't we in danger of making schools into dumping grounds for social and economic problems that are really other people's responsibility? Are teachers to be at the beck and call of every pushy parent and pressure group that has a bee in its bonnet or an axe to grind? Surely the last thing we need is yet more diversion of teachers' effort and energies away from working with students in their own classrooms!

We sympathize with these objections and reservations. It is true that many specious changes have been brought about under the banner of creating better partnerships between schools and other organizations. There are times when partnerships with industry have led to corporate dollars driving the curriculum in dubious directions; when partnerships with faculties of education have come down to teachers in schools carrying the faculty's staff supervision load for them; and when partnerships with parents have amounted to little more than cosmetic committee work, or to appeasing the demands of an aggressive minority. It is also true that teachers have become increasingly and unreasonably buffeted by the single-issue demands of various interest groups, and by the capricious policy whims of successive governments. Partnerships are not always benevolent and pressure groups outside the school frequently have more than the children's interests at heart.

So why should teachers and principals work with others outside the school for better teaching and learning within it when so many outside demands are politically suspect or bureaucratically time-consuming? What's the problem here?

What Are The Problems?

Our argument in a nutshell is best expressed by de Gues in *The Living Company* (1997):

to cope with a changing world, any entity must develop the capability of shifting and changing, of developing new skills and attitudes: in short the capability of learning . . . the essence of learning is the ability to manage change by changing yourself – as much for people when they grow up as for companies when they live through turmoil (p. 20).

To gain greater control over the environment we must change our stance towards it. There are several reasons why schools need to connect more effectively with the wider world beyond them:

1. schools cannot shut their gates and leave the outside world on the doorstep;
2. more diversity demands greater flexibility;
3. the technology juggernaut is breaking down the walls of schooling;
4. schools are one of our last hopes for rescuing and reinventing community;
5. teachers can do with more help; and so can parents and communities;
6. education is essential for democracy;
7. market competition, parental choice and individual self-management are redefining how schools relate to their wider environments;
8. schools can no longer be indifferent to what kinds of living and working await their students when they move into the adult world;

9. the pressures of today's complex environments are relentless, and contradictory; and

10. our existing structures are exhausted.

1. SCHOOLS CANNOT SHUT THEIR GATES AND LEAVE THE OUTSIDE WORLD ON THE DOORSTEP.

For teachers, what's "out there" beyond their school is not an academic abstraction or a futuristic projection.

Schools can no longer pretend that their walls will keep the outside world at bay. As Elkind (1997) says, they have become porous and permeable institutions. Increased poverty creates hungry children who cannot learn and tired ones who cannot concentrate. Fractured, blended and lone parent families fill teachers' classes with children who are often troubled, presenting teachers with parents' nights of labyrinthine complexity; also leaving teachers with outdated curriculum materials where families with two parents and their own biological children are presented as the cultural norm. Increased rates and changing patterns of global migration coupled with continuing low levels of teacher recruitment from visible minorities, mean that teachers are often teaching "other people's children" whose backgrounds are unfamiliar to them and whose learning needs are unknown (Delpit, 1993). In some of the large urban school districts with which we have worked, over 50% of the students are classified as English as a Second Language and over 70 languages are spoken in the schools. For teachers, what's "out there" beyond their school is not an academic abstraction or a futuristic projection. It stares back at them everyday through the eyes of the students they teach. The issue is not whether teachers connect with what's "out there" beyond their school, but how effectively they do so.

2. MORE DIVERSITY DEMANDS GREATER FLEXIBILITY.

A culturally diverse student population should not mean business-as-usual in our classrooms, with a few adjustments for cultural and language

differences added on. The changes that are needed extend beyond recognizing a few more cultural festivals or adding specific components of second language learning. They reach right down to the basic principles of teaching and learning itself.

Not only are many classes highly heterogeneous in terms of ethnicity, cultural meaning, recency of immigration, etc., but there is also so much else going on in the outside lives of students. In the homogeneous classrooms of yesterday a strict well prepared teacher could at least reach those interested in learning. Not so today. It has always been the case that teaching means reaching the student. It is just so much more difficult to do it these days.

Dryden (1995) noted that: "so much is going on in each kid's life, every story is so complicated" (p. 84). Students are often disengaged from their own learning, and it is enormously difficult for teachers to enter their world.

Given the cultural mix of students, there are few common contents taught to the class as a whole, that would conceivably engage all students. Factor in special education students who have increasingly been integrated into regular classes, and the diversity is greater still. Diversity demands flexibility. Properly accommodating diversities in culture, language and learning styles means fundamentally rethinking the very core of what we teach and how we teach it. For teachers everywhere, this is a daunting and inescapable challenge.

3. THE TECHNOLOGY JUGGERNAUT IS BREAKING DOWN THE WALLS OF SCHOOLING.

Schooling is now available in cyberspace.

Around 40% of young people in North America now have access to a personal computer at home. Many more make extensive use of television, video and the music culture of the streets. For the youth of today, the geography of learning stretches far beyond the physical space of the school. New technologies enable many students to reach out and connect with other students, other teachers, other worlds: to surf the internet and ride the information superhighway without the teacher's immediate monitoring,

support and intervention. Learning can often take place as easily at home as at school. Schooling is now available in cyberspace. Indeed, home-schooling is enjoying a significant rise in popularity. Students often know more about technology than their teachers and are able to access learning more easily through it. Unless teachers get up to speed in using technology in their classrooms, the hold they have on their students will weaken. Moreover, as we shall argue in Chapter 3, unless teachers become experts in *designing pedagogy* for using technology, computers will do more harm than good.

In their rush to compete with the computer age, and to keep their children's attention, teachers run the risk of reducing education to entertainment and losing sight of their larger purposes as a result (Postman, 1992; Soll, 1995). The computer age is chipping away at the walls of schooling and at the autonomy and authority of teachers within them. By permitting worldwide communication at the tap of a keyboard, computer technology dissolves the distinction between what's "out there" and what's "in here" altogether. Teachers should not capitulate unthinkingly to new technology but they clearly cannot turn away from it either. Their students and the society in which we live will not let them.

Like all of the forces we talk about, globalization and technology can be destructive and liberating depending on how we relate to them. We have no choice in deciding whether technology will affect us. The only choice is figuring out how we will change ourselves and each other to respond to it and turn it to our advantage.

4. SCHOOLS ARE ONE OF OUR LAST HOPES FOR RESCUING AND REINVENTING COMMUNITY.

A good school is the price of peace in the community.

Ursula Franklin (1997)

Science and technology, rational planning and modernization have eroded tradition and eliminated the places where community once thrived. The friendly clutter of the corner store has been replaced by the sleek lines and anonymity of the pedestrian precinct and the shopping mall. Many members

of the middle class have deserted the city for the safety of the suburbs where neighbours often care more for their lawns than they do for each other. In many communities, affiliation with major Christian churches is in decline, as is attendance at religious services. Only on the television programme "Cheers", it seems, can most people find a place where "everybody knows your name." The price of consumer affluence has been anonymity and alienation. And the heaviest price has been paid by those too poor to participate in the consumer society at all, eking out their existence in the dislocation and desolation of the old inner cities which modernization has left behind.

Recently, there are signs that people are struggling to recreate a sense of community, and the meaning and support that are to be found there. As Reid (1996:29) reports in a survey of Canadians: "In a world in which the permanence of just about every other relationship can't be taken for granted, family and friends seem to matter more than ever."

Because of its geographical convenience and its connection to the lives of many families, the neighbourhood school is the most obvious focus for community building efforts. As Ursula Franklin (1997) has enigmatically put it: "a good school is the price of peace in the community".

5. TEACHERS CAN DO WITH MORE HELP; AND SO CAN PARENTS AND COMMUNITIES.

The point about community is not just that schools can serve their wider communities better, but that these communities can also be an active source of support for teachers in school. And teachers can certainly do with the help. More and more social work and paperwork are getting in the way of classroom work with children. Scarcely a week goes by without schools being confronted by more imposition of endless change. Above all, teachers need support because education should be viewed as a shared responsibility among many parts of society.

In *What's Worth Fighting For? Working Together for Your School* we showed how working more closely with colleagues could reduce duplication, share the burden, provide moral support and give teachers the collective

strength to set priorities among all the demands that are placed upon them. But even this is no longer enough. The pressure for teachers to change their classroom practice towards more intensive work with individuals and small groups so as to accommodate the multiple intelligences and varied learning styles of culturally diverse students, means that teachers need help inside the classroom as well as collegial support outside it. This means bringing the community into the school and the classroom to offer clerical support, help in preparing materials, supervision of needy students, and assistance with children's reading. All these kinds of support already have a strong record of success in many schools although, as we shall show later, they need to be extended and developed further. Where school-community relations are concerned we have barely begun to scratch the surface.

To say that teachers need more help is not to imply they are somewhat incapable, inadequate or cannot cope. Giving and asking for help works best when it is reciprocal, when teaching is seen as inherently difficult – as something that everyone needs help with; not just those who are weak, or new to the job. The same applies to the help teachers need from parents or other members of the community. To want this help is not to be professionally wanting – but to recognize that doing the increasingly difficult and complex work of teaching means harnessing all the human resources you can get. As our late colleague Matt Miles put it: "seeking help is a sign of intelligence not weakness." Indeed, there is a good deal of evidence that the more successful a school is and the more it reaches out to engage more and more partners, then the stronger it becomes.

Similarly, teachers who act as if they have something to learn as well as something to contribute, establish better learning relationships with students and parents. Many teachers will have to learn to use their specialized expertise not to separate themselves from parents, and other adults, but to redefine their relationships with other adults in ways that allow them to be both open and authoritative. Patients prefer medical general practitioners who are properly qualified, know their stuff and keep up-to-date. They also like GPs who give them time, listen properly to how they describe their ailments, explain their diagnosis and treatments clearly, and are open and honest when

they don't know what the diagnosis is. So should it be with teachers and other adults – teachers should be confident in their expertise, clear and reciprocal in their communication, and not pretend to be perfect or infallible about the judgements they make. Becoming more open and authoritative as professionals is one of the things that is truly worth fighting for to improve teachers' relations with other adults in their schools and wider communities.

The flip side of teachers needing help is that parents and communities need it too. It is time to stop demonizing teachers while idealizing parents and communities. As Steinberg (1996) observes:

The first, and most significant, problem is the high prevalence of disengaged parents in contemporary America. By our estimate, nearly one in three parents in America is seriously disengaged from his or her adolescent's life, and especially from the adolescent's education (1996: 187).

For at least a decade we have known that efforts to engage parents and communities with teachers can reap enormous dividends for students' learning, especially those from disadvantaged circumstances (Epstein, 1995). There is no reason to believe that parents are automatically better at their role than teachers. Both need to develop new skills and attitudes to raise young people better in a rapidly changing world.

Most schools now connect poorly with their communities. Too many are not even good communities in themselves. This is especially true of large, specialized high schools. The bigger schools get, the more impersonal they become; the more exclusively academic is their focus, the less they are able to care for their clients (be they students or parents). Some critics have likened secondary schools to overcrowded airports where students have to rush between lessons like dashing between flights, and where they have little or no space, no place to belong of their own (D. Hargreaves, 1982).

In turning schools into stronger communities, school reforms should not be separated from wider urban reform. They depend on each other. Many of the problems that plague urban schools stem from the problems of cities

themselves. The full solution lies outside the schools as well as within them. This is not an excuse for schools to sit back and wait for the city to change. It is a rallying cry for the two to work together more closely. However, that doesn't mean that you have to work on all issues at once. Rather, as Walsh (1997) says: "the best projects tackle what they are best positioned to make a difference on and work out from there" (p. 36). Teachers and parents need each other and need to learn from each other in order to do the job of teaching and learning better.

6. EDUCATION IS ESSENTIAL FOR DEMOCRACY.

Family is not always the best metaphor for community.

Communities are not always democracies. Small town nostalgia is not the sense of community we are advocating here – where community is inward-looking and ethnically homogeneous. Communities today must look outward as well as inward and must include and give voice to all their members. Some advocates of community restoration present rather paternalistic notions of community where duty, loyalty and service are paramount. Here community goes with hierarchy. In many schools that describe themselves as families, the managerial professionals effectively become the school while everyone else is treated like dependent children. Family is not always the best metaphor for community.

Like others, we believe that schools should build not just any kind of community, but *democratic communities* which value participation, equality, inclusiveness and social justice, in addition to loyalty and service among all their members (Merz & Fuhrman, 1997). These communities should start in the classrooms in which students share responsibility for their own learning and for regulating each others' behaviour. Involving students and parents in decision-making, teaching and learning decisions, parent conferences and assessment of achievement extend these democratic principles further. Public education has an important role to play in developing and maintaining democratic societies. Goodlad (1997) begins his chapter on 'Education and Democracy' with these words:

There is a contextual surround that invariably shapes the educational process. The political context is critical. The shaping that takes place in a fascist or communist regime is quite different from that in a democracy. The social context is equally, or perhaps even more critical. People who live by sword or gun raise their children by very different beliefs than do people who value negotiation as the proper way to resolve disagreements (p. 23).

He continues: "what we have in mind . . . is education that develops in humans the dispositions to make choices that benefit self and community mutually" (p. 43).

Democracy, in many nations that take pride in the word, is in jeopardy. This is not because the military runs the government or elections have come to an end, but because more and more people are withdrawing from political participation and public life. In *The Culture of Contentment*, Galbraith (1992) describes how people have become increasingly disillusioned with politics and politicians. They vote less, care less, trust less. People mourn for religious and cultural leaders now, not for political figures. The comfortably-off, says Galbraith, have withdrawn into a culture of self-absorbed contentment. Meanwhile, the poor and the marginalized have sunk into alienation and despair. Politics is in peril, public commitment is in decline and democracy is in danger of becoming a shell of what it should be.

Historian, David Labaree (1997) says that for many decades, American education has been treated as a private good not a public good. It has put individual competitive achievement before civic duty and improving the quality of public life for all. All the democratic ideals of citizenship, equity and thoughtful choice to which John Dewey and other leading thinkers committed themselves for so long have been overwhelmed by test scores, content coverage and competitive achievement in an educational war of all against all. If the democracy of public life is endangered now, it is in part because we are now having to reap socially what we have sown educationally in the past.

Can we maintain a healthy democracy in the absence of a healthy public school system? We and others think not.

Galbraith's (1996:17) 'Good Society':

Education not only makes democracy possible; it also makes it essential. Education not only brings into existence a population with an understanding of the public tasks; it also creates their demand to be heard."

Similarly Saul (1995) says that the primary purpose of education is "to show individuals how they can function together in a society" (p. 138.) And further,

[Democracy] continues to exist only through the daily efforts of its citizenry [who must] delight in the human condition of sympathy of others versus self-loathing and cynicism regarding the qualities of others (p. 155).

In modern societies the relationship between democracy and schooling has always been too abstract, or perhaps taken for granted and thereby often neglected. It should no longer be. Teachers and parents observe democracy deteriorating every time the gap between a privileged and unprivileged learner widens, every time the public school system weakens and independent schools become the institutions of choice for those who can afford it.

As Saul concludes:

The existence of high quality national public education school systems for the first dozen or so years of training is the key to democracy where legitimacy lies with the citizen. At first hearing, this may sound like a motherhood statement. But the reality is that throughout the West – not just in the United States – we are slipping away from that simple principle of high quality public education. And, in doing so, we are further undermining democracy (p. 65).

Public schools need to develop more of what Coleman (1990) termed 'social capital' or what we call civic community – to help produce citizens who have the commitment, skills and dispositions to foster norms of civility, compassion, fairness, justice, sharing, trust, collaborative engagement, and constructive critiques in conditions of great social diversity.

7. MARKET COMPETITION, PARENTAL CHOICE AND INDIVIDUAL SELF-MANAGEMENT ARE REDEFINING HOW SCHOOLS RELATE TO THEIR WIDER ENVIRONMENTS.

Decentralization can sweep away bureaucracy, but it often removes local professional support as well.

Although schooling is becoming more centralized in some respects, through the proliferation of curriculum targets, learning standards and achievement tests, their day-to-day management and responsibility for meeting quality standards and performance goals is increasingly a matter for individual school determination. Schools are having to become more market conscious, more competitive for "clients", more preoccupied with image and public relations. School councils or parent councils and charter schools have been widely legislated as one way to push schools in this direction of market consciousness and client responsiveness. It is clear that such councils are turning teachers and principals outwards toward wider publics as they plan, present and defend what they teach. However, the benefits of all this for students are not always so clear.

Market competition and school self-management may make teachers more diligent in courting parental support and involvement. They may even urge teachers to work more closely with their immediate colleagues to ensure the success and survival of their own school. But this kind of institutional competitiveness also divides schools and their teachers from each other. Decentralization can sweep away bureaucracy, but it often removes local professional support as well. Teachers have little incentive to work with and learn from colleagues in other schools when their schools are in competition for clients.

An unintended consequence of the self-managing school movement is that it may create huge vacuums of professional development at the local level. For example, in England, where self-managing schools have been in existence for many years, teachers' opportunities to attend local professional meetings in their school district, or to attend professional development

where they can exchange views and experiences with colleagues from elsewhere have decreased. In one recent study, Helsby & Knight (1997) found that lessened opportunity for cross-school collaboration coupled with pressures to compete have resulted in insular school-based activities.

So how can we fill the professional development vacuum that the moves towards self-management often create? We must search for new and better ways to enable teachers to learn from their colleagues in other schools, so they can belong in a real sense to a wider profession, with all the wisdom and learning it has to offer. Making connections outside one's own school is a multifaceted task, not one that is confined to the immediate neighbourhood or community.

8. SCHOOLS CAN NO LONGER BE INDIFFERENT TO WHAT KINDS OF LIVING AND WORKING AWAIT THEIR STUDENTS WHEN THEY MOVE INTO THE ADULT WORLD.

What's out there in the changing economy is also inside students' heads, in their anxieties and aspirations.

When students leave school or even university, there is no immediate work for many of them anymore, or the work is very different than it used to be. The economies of the developed world are in turmoil. Restructuring and downsizing are pervasive. Bridges (1994:5) comments that after the U.S. recession of the late 1980s and early 1990s, only 18% of the lost jobs had returned. In other recessions, the jobs eventually came back. This time, he says, the message is clear, "jobs are going away, not just until times improve but for good." More than this, he observes, the way we package work into discrete, well-defined, lifelong bundles called jobs is itself a fading phenomenon.

Similarly, in his study of 'How the New Economy is Changing Our Lives' in Canada, Reid (1996) discredits several powerful economic myths including:

- growth is good for everyone;
- science and technology will save us;

- a good education means a good job; and
- the public interest still counts.

In their blistering attack on corporate criticisms of Canadian education, Barlow and Robertson (1994:69) note that between 1989 and 1993, permanent plant closures accounted for 65% of all layoffs. Yet less than one quarter of layoffs were caused by such closures during the 1981-82 recession. Ironically, they conclude, "while it is easy to find many examples of business criticizing education's 'failures,' it is much more difficult to find concrete promises of real jobs by the corporate community" (p. 61).

Part-time work, temporary work and contracting out are the new ingredients of corporate flexibility. Their rapid growth is challenging our traditional conceptions of what work is and how it is organized, along with our relationships to employers, and the importance we attach to paid work within our wider lives. Handy (1994) notes that for more and more young people, paid permanent work will start later in their lives and finish sooner, compared to their parents' generation.

When the world of work becomes so totally unreliable some want schools to wash their hands of the business connection. But this makes no sense. Students are as aware as anyone of the changing economic realities. They know that pieces of paper no longer provide automatic passports to security or success. The job lights are dimming at the end of the educational tunnel and this is leading students to question their work ethic and the relevance of what their schools offer them. What's "out there" in the changing economy is also inside students' heads, in their anxieties and aspirations. We should critique these changing work realities as we connect with them, but we can't turn back the clock to simpler schooling for simpler times and ignore them.

Others want closer connections between schooling and work. They advocate partnerships with industry, corporate investment in education,

business involvement in the curriculum, more student placements on work experience, putting more emphasis in schools on the skills that business requires, and restructuring the management and organization of schooling along similar lines to the restructuring that has taken place elsewhere. These kinds of connections can provide a treasure chest of stimuli for learning. Or they can be a Pandora's box of corporate 'hype' and financial expediency. What's worth fighting for beyond your school, therefore, is not just building partnerships with business, but creating partnerships that are morally defensible and educationally worthwhile. Working well with business partners means opening their hearts and minds, not just their wallets.

Schools should not only connect with the workplace, but also put work in its place alongside the other things that young people aspire to and value. Wynn's (1994) extensive research in Australia shows that the aspirations of most youth are not only for worthwhile work but also for a decent life. For young people, she says:

Achieving adulthood involves getting a good job, as well as establishing intimate social relationships and participating at a political level. The main issue for the transition process is not just one of jobs, it is of establishing a livelihood.

Indeed, the disappearance of jobs as we know them is leading many people to re-evaluate the place that work occupies in their lives -- choosing where they work before what they work at and valuing their lifestyle choices alongside or above their choices of career.

Clearly, there's a lot waiting "out there" for young people when they leave school which affects how they respond to what schools offer. Creating morally defensible connections with the working world and preparing young people for a wider livelihood that is satisfying and worthwhile, are two of the more fundamental things worth fighting for beyond our schools.

9. THE PRESSURES OF TODAY'S COMPLEX ENVIRONMENTS ARE RELENTLESS, AND CONTRADICTORY.

Not all instances of chaos and uncertainty are accidental, unintended or unavoidable.

There is 'a new science of complexity' which says that the link between cause and effect is increasingly difficult to trace; that change (planned or otherwise) unfolds in non-linear ways; that paradoxes and contradictions abound; and that creative solutions arise out of diversity, uncertainty and chaos (Stacey, 1996). Because schools and school systems are scrutinized so publicly they can become special victims of complex, rapidly changing environments (and also special beneficiaries as we shall argue later). There are several reasons for the increased chaos and complexity that educators now face.

First, the instant access to information and heightened speed of decision-making that have been created by new technologies, significantly reduce our ability to foresee and control events. The result is greater anxiety and stress. One way that people respond to all this uncertainty is by seeking "the latest comprehensive recipe for success" (Stacey, 1996:7). These 'silver bullets' may reduce anxiety temporarily, but eventually lead to long-term cynicism when none of them work. Working effectively as educators with the rapidly changing world outside school means abandoning these illusions of administrative predictability and control.

A second cause of uncertainty and complexity in teachers' work also arises from the increased speed of information flow and decision making. Modern technology compresses time and space. The media present instant stories and reaction to public policy announcements with such speed that inaccuracies and superficial debate are common. Under these circumstances, change strategies can degenerate into uncoordinated reflex reactions. A principal of a secondary school described to us how being an educational leader these days was like living in an endless present – always responding to immediate and insistent pressures, with no time to think ahead or to reflect

on how things had gone already. Reflex reactions are superficial reactions. There have to be better ways of responding to the world beyond school than this.

Third, even the knowledge bases that guide our educational responses to complexity are unstable. Knowledge about classroom learning, effective leadership or planned change, for example, is constantly being challenged. Rapid circulation and wide availability of scientific information mean that findings begin to be overturned almost the moment they are released. We now work in worlds of great scientific uncertainty. Many of the truths of today are the half-truths or falsehoods of tomorrow. This is a curse, but also a blessing. Scientific uncertainty creates anxiety. Yet it also reduces our blind dependence on the proclamations of others. We have a chance to take change out of the hands of experts and place it in the laps of our communities, our colleagues and ourselves. From this vantage point we can relate to experts in a less dependent manner.

Fourth, greater diversities of culture, language and religion in our student populations are throwing traditional educational goals into question and making consensus difficult to achieve. Some people seek to solve this problem by creating schools of choice. Each cultural and religious group, they say, should be permitted to have its own schools, based on its own unique values. This solution accommodates the demands of difference but at the price of tolerance, working together and mutual understanding that are essential to the ideals of community and democracy. Other people respond to increased uncertainty and diversity by retreating to comfortable memories of the past. They long to return to schools with simple curricula and singular values as they remembered them thirty years or more ago. They are drawn to lost golden ages, to myths and illusions of ill-remembered pasts (Hargreaves, 1994). Nostalgia, it is worth noting, was originally regarded as an illness. The solutions it offers are unworkable with the diverse communities of today.

Fifth, not only are outside pressures and demands on teachers increasing, they are also contradictory. For example, advocates of greater curriculum relevance and teaching for understanding want to expose students to more

socially controversial material which will help them develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Powerful pressure groups from the religious right do not want sacred truths and culturally conservative values to be questioned, so they push in the opposite direction. The pressures of cultural diversity are leading policy-makers to embrace multiple intelligences and varied learning styles, while parents and some employers' groups agitating for "quality" education want greater standardization. Teachers may find that their principals and school districts subscribe to whole-language methodologies, whereas many of the parents of their students who come from other cultures may feel that more didactic approaches to teaching reading are better. Policy makers are often too faint-hearted to choose between these different ideological directions. So they frequently fudge them – creating policies that are ambiguous and contradictory. Teachers have the unenviable job of dealing with the consequences.

How are teachers to cope with these contradictions? Some comply with the pressures of the stronger group and ignore those that are less pressing. Others veer incoherently and chaotically from one demand to the next – teaching to cross-curricular outcomes at one moment, and filling in traditional report cards the next. Then there are those who try to appease all groups by making their teaching and curriculum as inoffensive and innocuous (and consequently as uninteresting) as possible. All these responses are educationally unsatisfactory. They concede influence to those with the greatest power and strongest voice, and create incoherence and inconsistency in the curriculum.

Not all instances of chaos and uncertainty are accidental, unintended or unavoidable. Some of it is manufactured by governmental and corporate power to maximize their interests of tax reduction and social control by keeping labour forces flexible, interest groups fragmented and everyone off-balance. Berliner & Biddle (1996) in the United States, and Barlow & Robertson (1994) in Canada have described how across the world, myths of falling standards, feckless teachers and failing schools have been used to destabilize public confidence in education and provide pretexts for widespread political

impositions of educational reform. This kind of manufactured chaos should be attacked, not accommodated.

Yet in their study of school administrators' responses to powerful social change forces like poverty, new technologies and changing labour markets, in five school districts, Levin and Riffel (1997) conclude that schools and school systems:

- do not really know how to respond to the changes they experience;
- have developed no systematic ways of learning about the nature and implications of the social changes around them;
- have limited and unimaginative strategies for responding to change;
- have perceptions and reactions that are dominated by conventional wisdom, with the result that they try familiar (but unsuccessful) solutions, or low-risk one-of-a-kind initiatives that have little impact on the larger system; *and*
- possess a weak outward-looking stance.

It is time for teachers and schools to take greater initiative; to adopt coherent and collective moral stands in relation to these pressures; to represent children's interest in the political tussle for education, when children cannot represent their own. Many teachers and their organizations now do this. But answering critics by hanging on to existing practice and defending the status quo is not enough. Teachers' stance towards assessment and standards policy is a good case in point. Teachers rightly object to achievement data being used in crude and misleading ways to rank schools in published league tables of performance (taking no account of the different kinds of communities in which these schools are placed). Yet there is no use trying to keep the lid on performance data. Instead, the most effective teachers wade into the fray contesting what is misleading, and creating more meaningful, well-rounded school profiles to communicate what goes on in their classrooms. You can run but you cannot hide from the chaotic and complex environments surrounding schools today.

10. OUR EXISTING STRUCTURES ARE EXHAUSTED.

We have seen that teachers now work in contexts of great diversity, complexity and uncertainty. Yet existing school structures do not enable them to respond as they should. Many teachers are having to learn to teach in ways they were not taught themselves. Teachers' formal responsibilities are with whole classes, but many of their tasks in assessment and student-centered learning are with individuals and small groups. Many secondary school teachers are being asked not only to teach their subjects but also to be guides and mentors for individual students' personal and career development. Parents clamour for more information about their children's progress, but contact is often restricted to a few awkward minutes with each teacher a couple of times a year. School structures and cultures are ill designed for teachers to meet the needs of all students, to have worthwhile discussions with parents, and even to work with each other. Existing structures and cultures make it agonizingly difficult for schools to respond effectively to what's "out there".

Ontario's Royal Commission on Learning (1995) concluded that if there is one theme "out there" it is "that Ontario's schools aren't equipped to deal with the future" (p. 3). The National Commission on the Future of Teaching in America (1996) similarly concludes that school structures are hopelessly outdated:

Today's schools are organized in ways that support neither student nor teacher learning well. Like the turn-of-the-century industries they were modeled after - most of which are now redesigning themselves - current structures were designed to mimic factories that used semi-skilled workers to do discrete pieces of work in a mass production assembly line (p. 45).

According to the Commission, schools "use time nonproductively" "use staff nonproductively," and "use money, nonproductively." Too many educators and parents are locked into existing structures where anything other than individual teachers in separate classes, students graded by age, a curriculum organized into subjects and divided into lesson periods,

secondary-school department heads vetting and vetoing any changes that might threaten their interests, and parents being contacted only at specified times in the year - is not considered to be 'real school' at all (Metz, 1990).

It is exhausting to use strategies of active and cooperative learning in a series of episodic subject periods. It is unreasonable to expect teachers to counsel or conference with individual students while leaving the rest of the class to fend for themselves. Existing structures tie teachers to inappropriate time frames. Isolating them within their classes insulates them from potential sources of in-class help: from fellow teachers, student teachers, parent helpers and other resources in the community.

Teachers who really value their emotional bonds to students are willing to experiment with alternative structures that make these bonds stronger. One Grade 8 teacher who was beginning to work with a schedule divided into bigger blocks of time, put it like this:

I can help any kid learn anything as long as he is motivated and I feel that I can motivate the kid through reality, natural situations. But in order to do that I have to be able to have block periods of time to setup situations where I can show them the reality of this and to me that's a great thing. I get rolling on something and if the kids get rolling on something I don't want to be stopped by a bell telling me to move on, so I welcome it.

(Hargreaves & Earl, 1997)

When teachers really put students and their connections to students first, structural changes often follow very close behind. But without structural change, community pressures and educational innovations just overwhelm them.

Structures that support teaching and learning, and that involve parents and others in supporting teaching and learning, cannot be changed by teachers themselves or by teachers keeping to themselves. Parents and others outside

the school must also challenge the existing organization of schooling. They must support unfamiliar structures that will actually help teachers to bring about positive change, and spare their energies in doing so. This is a monumental task of professional and community learning. A number of districts are now working on creating new in-built infrastructures in the school, the system and the community to support continuous learning and problem-solving (Fullan & Watson, 1997). Establishing radically new infrastructures and cultures of learning and teaching that are up to the task of working in the turbulent environments described in these pages – is one of the most essential things worth fighting for within and beyond our schools.

The Challenge

Parents must acknowledge that the schooling, which will be best for their children in the 21st century, must be very different from the schooling they experienced themselves.

The forces of change we have described are already evident within countless classrooms, in the characteristics of the children, in the problems and new potential they bring to the school, and in the way in which local and national interest groups make their presence known. Within these challenging and complex times, teachers must find more and better ways to work with others in the interests of students. They must define their sense of professionalism so that it does not place them above or set them apart from parents and the wider public, but gives them the confidence and courage to engage openly with others. Moreover, they must do this even when the conditions do not initially favour such action.

This does not, and should not, mean teachers running themselves into the ground with extra work beyond the responsibilities they already have. What needs to change in schools is how people work, not how much they work. The structures that have separated schools from the surrounding community have made the work more difficult. In fact, they have made it impossible.

Teachers should not be left alone in this quest. Parents must acknowledge that the schooling which will be best for their children in the 21st century, must be very different from the schooling they experienced themselves. They must let go of their attachments to old versions of schooling, and abandon nostalgic longings for ill-remembered pasts. They must certainly expect a lot of their children's teachers, but should base this on understanding, courtesy and partnership. Criticism and questioning is more palatable when it is accompanied by positive feedback, concrete help and active support. If parents expect teachers to change, they must show they are willing to change too.

In describing what's "out there" we have painted a picture of immense complexity. It is also one of tremendous excitement and possibility. Building community, protecting democracy, making education a public good as well as a private one, using new technologies to deepen learning, creating high quality education in contexts of great diversity – these things define the moral purpose of schooling for a society where sophisticated knowledge and skills will make young people economically productive, and where civic commitments will make them democratically responsible and active. Educators can only do all this, if individually and with others, they 'go deeper' and 'go wider'. Once they do, the teaching profession will never be quite the same again.